

Cover Crop/Nutrient Management TAC Subcommittee Meeting
Monday, October 20, 2025
Central High School Education Complex Auditorium
2748 Dogtown Road
Goochland, VA 23063
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Marie Schirmacher called the meeting to order at 10:01am. A quorum of 17 voting members was present. Ms. Schirmacher reviewed the actions the subcommittee can take on each matrix item: advance, amend, table, or defer.

The subcommittee members and attendees introduced themselves.

Voting Members Present:

Marie Schirmacher, DCR
Allyson Ponn, Lord Fairfax SWCD
Alston Horn, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Bob Waring, Colonial SWCD
Bryan Johnson, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Buck Tharpe, Southside SWCD
Cory Hoar, Virginia Dare SWCD
Courtney Coleman, Peanut SWCD
Hubert Bowman, Blue Ridge SWCD
Kemper Marable, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Luke Hudson, Halifax SWCD
Megan Trice, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Spencer Yager, Culpeper SWCD
Steve Jones, John Marshall SWCD
Tim Talley, Thomas Jefferson SWCD
Tom Hardiman, Virginia Grain Producers Association
Trevor Guy, Three Rivers SWCD

Non-Voting Participants Present:

Amy Walker, Colonial SWCD
Hunter Gravatt, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Hunter Landis, DCR
Hunter Quinones, DCR
Leigh Pemberton, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Marissa Roland, DCR
Michael Tabor, Blue Ridge SWCD
Nick Moody, DCR
Olivia Leatherwood, DCR
Sara Bottenfield, DCR
Shelby Foesness, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Sofia Tortolero, VCU
Wheeler Wood, VCU

Review of Cover Crop/Nutrient Management Matrix Items

Ms. Schirmacher presented the remaining matrix items in numerical order.

Item 1C: Create a CCI-SL-1 spec (refer to parameters set by full TAC in CY24). *Deferred in CY24*

Ms. Schirmacher presented a proposed draft of the CCI-SL-1 specification. There was discussion about eligibility and contract lifespan. There was a question about whether the presented specification was based on an earlier draft version proposed in prior TAC cycles, which Ms. Bottenfield clarified that the presented version was created to address the parameters set by the Full TAC last year. There was discussion about clarifying that the CCI is limited to 15 total years for Bay Model credit. Ms. Bottenfield suggested several edits to keep the specification consistent with other CCI cost-share practices.

Motion to advance CCI-SL-1 with language updates made by Alston Horne, second by Tim Talley; motion carried unanimously.

Item 2C: Change the 60% stand date from Dec. 15 to Jan. 1. For all VACS cover crop practices: Due to the change in planting dates in recent years, we recommend adjusting the date producers must achieve a good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover, by a minimum of 2 weeks, to match the adjustment made to the cover crop planting dates. It was the recommendation of Frank Long, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent, to extend the date as far out as February or March to be comparable to our partner agency's cover crop standards. The meeting attendees discussed the likelihood of such a radical change being made, which is why we are making the suggestion to correlate to the planting date change, as a minimum. This will allow the producers planting cover crops up to the November 30th planting deadline sufficient time to achieve a good stand and good growth to meet the 60% coverage requirement. The specification could read: "A good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover must be obtained by December 31 to protect the area from nutrient leaching and runoff in the fall and winter. All cover crop plantings must maintain a minimum of 60% cover crop plant material on the enrolled acres through the lifespan of the practice." *Deferred in CY24*

DCR provided clarification that this change is for the actual stand date rather than the verification date. The subcommittee chose to hold item until the end of the meeting.

Item 3C: The current Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) includes several important practices for the use of cover crops. The types of cover crop plants are largely based on grains, some legumes, and some brassicas. There is room for improvement. The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) organization also recommends the use of cover crops, but their recommended list of plants is more extensive than the current Ag BMPs. The enclosed table shows the differences. Also, under SARE's manual the use of the cover crops is more diverse. The increased plant diversity has several advantages to soil enrichment. A richer diversity of a mix of cover plants reportedly can produce better soil organic matter and deeper root structures. Expand the number of cover crop plans included in the Virginia Ag BMPs based on the SARE manual. *Deferred in CY24*

Ms. Schirmacher did not receive any additional data. The subcommittee discussed deferring until published data is provided.

Motion to defer until requested information is provided by Buck Tharpe, second by Courtney Coleman; motion carried unanimously.

Item 7C: Establish a BMP for composting of animal and plant organic matter for the subsequent return of the compost organic matter to the soil.

Ms. Schirmacher provided clarification about item 7C and reviewed additional information from the submitter.

Motion to table by Alston Horn, second by Buck Tharpe; there was discussion regarding the SL-8B specification stating that residue should not be removed at any time and NRCS having alternative options; motion carries unanimously.

Item 8C: Add tobacco for sidedressing of nitrogen.

Ms. Schirmacher presented additional information from Dr. David Reed at Virginia Tech regarding fertilizer on tobacco. DCR will work to format the specifications.

Motion to advance language inclusions in NM-3C and WFA-NM by Buck Tharpe, second by Kemper Marable; motion carried unanimously.

Item 9C: Allow field perimeter fence to be included as an eligible cost for SL-1 fields. Many folks are not willing to convert crops to hay ground- but if they could also graze the field, they are willing to do the SL-1.

Ms. Schirmacher presented the requested information. The subcommittee discussed that the item as presented did not mention the possible need for watering systems and that there are currently no specifications for perimeter fencing; it was discussed that program participants have the ability to utilize SL-7. There was discussion regarding the addition of fence turning this practice into a pasture practice rather than a conversion practice. The subcommittee discussed potentially increasing the incentive payments that participants could potentially use for fencing.

Motion to table as there is no clear water quality benefit by Buck Tharpe, second by Bob Waring; one opposed, no abstentions; motion carried.

Item 10C: For the SL-8B practice, remove the approved rye cultivars list and allow all cereal rye varieties to be eligible for the \$20 bonus. The Bay Model does not distinguish between tetraploid, diploid, or different varieties of cereal rye. If the Bay Model is valuing all cereal rye as the standard for N Effectiveness, why is VACS subdividing rye into different cultivars? o All cereal rye is used as the standard (or reference value) for valuing N uptake for cover crops. Whereas, cereal rye is valued at 1.00 for N effectiveness and all other crops are based off of that value. For example, triticale has N effectiveness value of 0.86. (Source: Recommendations of the 2012-2013 Cover Crop Expert Panel, ADDITION OF NEW SPECIES TO COVER CROP BMP, Addition of New Cover Crop

Species with Nitrogen Reduction Efficiencies for Use in Phase, 5.3.2 of the Chesapeake Bay Program Watershed Model.) o Seed sourcing is becoming more difficult, and our District has found that even the seed growers/suppliers are unsure whether their rye is tetraploid “for indeterminate growth”. Additionally, some of the cultivars on the SL-8B list are not tetraploids.

Ms. Schirmacher presented information from Mr. Wade Thompson regarding the historic distinction between tetraploid vs. diploid rye; tetraploid is generally seen as faster germinating and better at nitrogen scavenging. There was discussion regarding the Bay Model not giving credit based on specific cultivars of rye. There was discussion about removing rye cultivar table under C.4.i in SL-8B specification. There was discussion about changing language in B.9 to say “cereal winter rye” and keeping the seeding rates. There was discussion regarding the \$20 bonus for rye not being included any longer.

Motion to advance with removal of rye cultivar table and update language to “cereal winter rye” in SL-8B, SL-8M, and WFA-CC by Buck Tharpe, second by Cory Hoar; motion carried unanimously.

Item 12C: Consider a practice for planting native/pollinator plants on agricultural land consistent with NRCS Practice Code and Standard 327. These plantings may be done on cropland being converted perennial native plants that would address soil, water, and wildlife habitat degradation resource concerns to meet landowner objectives.

There was discussion regarding the possibility of non-native plants bringing in invasive species or noxious weeds, pollinator plants not germinating well, and cost being a prohibiting factor. The subcommittee discussed this being an option for field edges or borders.

Motion to defer contingent upon the suggesting District providing a draft specification to the subcommittee by Buck Tharpe, second by Trevor Guy; there was some discussion about keeping the payment rates in line with other similar practices, potentially including a ceiling so there is a difference between large acreage establishment and field edges/borders, and timeline about land retirement; motion carried unanimously.

Item 2C

The subcommittee revisited item 2C. Clarification was provided that Model credit is determined by plant date, method, etc. Ms. Bottenfield shared confirmation that in the process DCR follows for reporting data to the Bay Model and thus to EPA, changing the stand dates would not affect DCR reporting to the Model.

Motion to advance by Buck Tharpe, second by Kemper Marable; one abstention; motion carried.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Ms. Schirmacher announced that the Full TAC will meet October 30, 2025 at the Central High School Education Complex Auditorium at 10:00 am.

Mr. Horn suggested the subcommittee meet every two years to allow time for specifications and practices to be applied in the field.

Motion to adjourn at 11:41 am by Kemper Marable, second by Buck Tharpe.